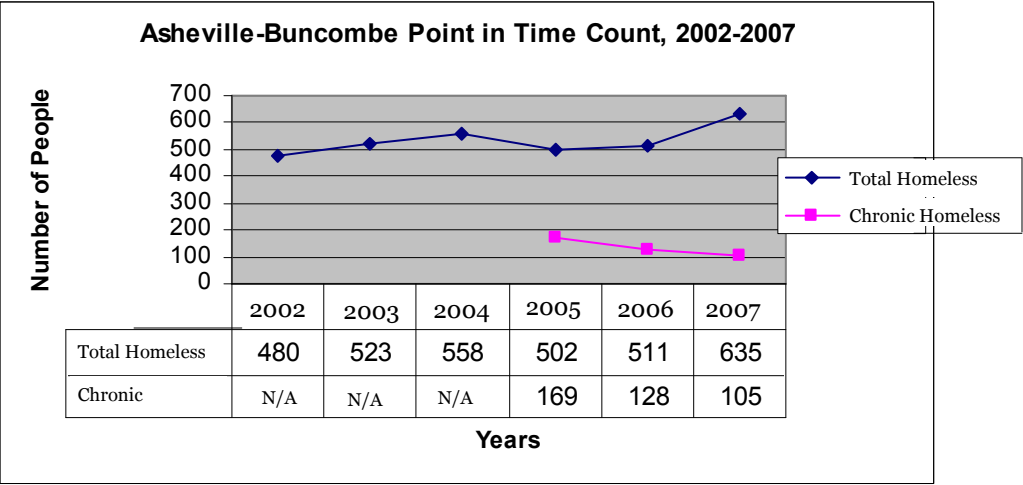


A look at the numbers:  
Point In Time Count



Getting a true picture of how many homeless individuals and families are in Asheville throughout the year is one of the most difficult aspects of planning housing and services for the homeless.

The transitory nature of people experiencing homelessness makes it difficult to grasp a full understanding of the problem. Asheville has participated in a “Point in Time Count” since 2001 to try and get an idea of the magnitude of homelessness. This annual count is designed to measure how many people are experiencing homelessness in Asheville-Buncombe on a single night. The count provides a yearly “snapshot” of the population, and is a useful tool in capturing information for one night. It, however, does not help us understand trends in the number of persons that may experience homelessness *throughout the year*.

Variations in participation and methods can make it difficult to depend *solely* on the Point in Time count as a definitive count. Starting in 2005, methods of collection and analysis were refined when a national baseline count was created. Subsequent years have shown an increase in the sophistication of Point in Time Count methods locally and nationally. In order to stay abreast of these changes, representatives from Asheville-Buncombe have participated in trainings and technical assistance.

The more sophisticated methods include such things as an increase in providers who have joined the count recent years, using clear definitions, and greater outreach. This is both a blessing and a challenge. Our focus on methods presently allows us to more confidently report numbers. These improvements in conducting the count should be considered as one of the contributing factors in the apparent increase in the total homeless population. Essentially, our count numbers may increase as we get better at reaching more of the homeless on the day of the count. Other communities have experienced this quandary: Phoenix, Detroit, Seattle, and Philadelphia, as well as Charlotte, Greensboro, Chapel Hill, and Winston Salem, NC to name a few. (Winston-Salem’s numbers almost doubled between 2005 and 2006.)<sup>1</sup>

**The only way our community will truly understand the nature of homelessness is to have the ability to do a daily count and track housing placements and services throughout the year.** In order to end homelessness in Asheville-Buncombe, we need to know how many people are experiencing homeless on any given day, what their needs are, and what solutions work to move out of homelessness. Luckily, the community has this capability-providers in the community are in the early stages of using a homeless management information system (HMIS). This database will provide clear, consistent, and accessible information needed to truly understand homelessness in Asheville and Buncombe County.

Despite the challenges with the Point in Time Count, we are able to see that *chronic, long-term* homelessness is declining. This is due to the efforts of the Homeless Initiative, which is based on the 10-Year Plan to End Homelessness. While we are confident in this success of declining long-term homelessness, our point in time count shows an increase in *total* number of people experiencing homelessness. Aside from using better methodology, there are some other logical explanations for the increase in the total number of people experiencing homelessness. It is likely that no one factor discussed is totally responsible, and instead, it is a combination of all of these factors:

- While the total number of homeless people has increased, the total population of Asheville-Buncombe has also continued to increase at the same rate. The total population of Asheville and Buncombe County residents is on the rise. From 2000-2006 there was a 7% increase in the population.<sup>2</sup> During this same time, there was also a 7% increase in the homeless population.<sup>3</sup>
- The cost of living in Asheville-Buncombe is high. The average cost of a single bedroom apartment is \$656.<sup>4</sup> In order to afford this, a person would need to make \$12.61 an hour if they work 40 hours a week.<sup>5</sup> In 2006, approximately 28% of individuals residing in Asheville-Buncombe made less than that, putting them at risk of losing their housing.<sup>6</sup>

- We are susceptible to national trends: national socio-economic factors do effect people experiencing homelessness in Asheville-Buncombe as much as they have elsewhere.

Footnotes:  
1 National Alliance to End Homelessness, November 2007. www.naeh.org  
2 US Census Bureau, November 2007, www.census.gov  
3 Asheville-Buncombe Homeless Coalition, January 2006, www.abchomeless.org  
4 &6 Asheville Chamber of Commerce, November 2007, www.ashevillechamber.org  
5 North Carolina Affordable Housing Coalition, November 2007, www.nchousing.org

Asheville-Buncombe’s 10-Year Plan to End Homelessness

HOMELESS INITIATIVE  
Progress Report 2007

Partners in Ending Homelessness in Asheville-Buncombe

- Advocates and Advocacy Groups
- Businesses
- Civic Groups
- Government Agencies
- Faith Groups
- Media
- National and State advocacy and planning groups
- Neighbors
- Non Profits Organizations
- People who have experienced homelessness
- People who are experiencing homelessness
- ...YOU!!!

People who are homeless come from all walks of life, lose housing for a variety of reasons, and struggle to regain housing in different ways. Homelessness is a multi-faceted issue that requires attention from several different individuals and groups, using a variety of tactics.

The HOMELESS INITIATIVE seeks to provide a platform for these groups to come together to address homelessness. The Homelessness Initiative uses best practices and finds new resources to get the job done. Asheville and Buncombe’s efforts continue to be held up as a model by bodies such as the United States Interagency Council on Homelessness.

This report provides a brief description of some of the innovative and exciting activities that our community is engaging with to truly address homelessness.

# Homeless Initiative Progress Report, 2007

## HOUSING FIRST

*The Housing First model, which is the placement of individuals who are experiencing chronic homelessness into permanent, supportive housing, is a key strategy adopted by the 10-Year Plan to End Homelessness.*

The number of individuals who were formerly chronically homeless that are now housed is on the rise. This is largely due to expansion of Western Carolina Community Health Services (WNCCHS) Shelter Plus Care program and a new Housing Support Team grant.

**The Shelter Plus Care** program is operated by WNCCHS. The program now provides permanent, supportive housing to 93 people who had been homeless.

**The Housing Support Team Grant**, one of three across the state, was granted to Western Highlands by the North Carolina Interagency Council for Coordinating Homeless Programs (NC ICCHP) with funds from the NC Mental Health Trust Fund.

- The grant provides \$644, 280 over two years to provide housing for 50-75 mentally ill people experiencing chronic homelessness.
- Since receiving the grant in May, 2007, 41 people have been housed by Homeward Bound, the agency contracted to provide the housing support team services.

**The Woodfin and the Griffin** apartment continue to house 32 individuals who were formerly homeless. The retention rate is 83%.

## NEW PROJECTS

*Partnerships with organizations and individuals has led to some important projects that will support individuals who are homeless:*

**The Homeless Initiative Lead Entity** is now the City of Asheville, supported in part through a partnership with Buncombe County.

**Day Center:** Expanded services and hours are now offered at the A-Hope Day Center, allowing for people to access needed supports. Additionally, partnerships are being formed to create an even more extensive assessment and resources center.

**Expansion of A Vet’s Place:** ABCCM was recently awarded the largest V.A. capitol grant in the country to establish 100 new beds that provide emergency shelter, skill building, employment, and housing support through a multi-tiered system.

**Spare Change for Real Change:** This campaign sponsored by the Downtown Association will support a foundation designed to support homeless organizations.

**Wet Shelter:** Led by Buncombe County and supported by many agencies and organizations, a wet shelter is set to open in December.

**SOAR:** This is another project supported by a large network of organizations. It will help people with disabilities receive SSI/SSDI support in months instead of years.

There are many, many people working to address the issue of homelessness. To learn about more projects like the ones listed above, contact: Amy Sawyer @asawyer@ashevillenc.gov

## EVENTS

*Our community comes together to address homelessness through a series of events:*

**Homeless Persons’ Memorial Day, December 21st, 2007.**  
*Help us remember those who have died while homeless this past year. Volunteers are needed! For info: [www.december-21-2007.blogspot.com](http://www.december-21-2007.blogspot.com)*

- The event will be held at First Baptist Church
- 4PM: Memorial Service
- Followed by a dinner and open sleeping space so that no one will sleep outside in memory of those who have died. Shelters will be open and serving many people, this event will provide the opportunity for our community to ensure that no one sleeps outside on the longest night of the year.

**Project Connect /VA Stand Down:** Fifty Service agencies and businesses and 130 community volunteers came together to serve about 300 people experiencing homelessness.

**Homeless Initiative Planning Meetings:** Open to the public, these meetings are a space to brainstorm, dialogue, and ACT!

**North Carolina Homeless Conference:** This is a chance for our community to talk with others across the state to learn and share.



## DATA COLLECTION

*The Homeless Initiative tracks outcomes in order to respond to the needs and successes of people experiencing homelessness and the people supporting them.*

**A point in time count** is planned for January, 2008. This is a “snapshot” count that gives us a basic idea of how many people are homeless on one night each year.

**Statewide Accomplishment Report:** Asheville-Buncombe participates in a statewide report that evaluates successes in housing, services, and access to mainstream resources.

**The HOMELESS MANAGEMENT INFORMTAION SYSTEM: HMIS** is a software program that records numbers of homeless people and services used on a daily basis. It will allow us to better track the numbers and needs of those experiencing homelessness, and the homeless service system’s response to people.

- Regular trainings are offered to HMIS users.
- HMIS has been used to document information gathered at the Project Connect and VA Stand Down.
- The North Carolina Coalition to End Homelessness (NCCEH) is providing technical support to the local continuum of care group so that HMIS can be used to generate federally mandated reports.

**Housing First Research:** The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, has completed the first phase of research on Housing First tenants at the Woodfin and Griffin Apartments.

- A preliminary report is expected during the first quarter of 2008.
- The same research team has started research on tenants who are part of the Housing Support Team Grant.